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ABSTRACT

This Digest focuses on the teaching of Spanish to U.S. Hispanic bilinguals at the university level. Traditionally, Spanish has been taught as a second or foreign language in the United States, and little attention has been given to developing and coordinating well designed and carefully articulated programs for Hispanic bilingual students of different ethnic backgrounds. The digest looks specifically at student motivation for studying Spanish for native speakers; considerations for implementing instruction in Spanish for native speakers; suggested college-level textbooks; useful ideas for teaching Spanish to native speakers; and existing Spanish for native speakers programs. (VWL)

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ERIC Digest

Spanish for U.S. Hispanic Bilinguals in Higher Education

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS
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Digest

November 1992

Spanish for U.S. Hispanic Bilinguals in Higher Education

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Historically, Spanish has been taught as a foreign or second language in the United States. Little attention has been given to developing and coordinating well designed and carefully articulated programs for Hispanic bilingual college students of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In 1972, the Executive Council of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP) published a report that included a rationale and recommendations for teaching Spanish to native speakers (SNS) in schools and universities (AATSP, 1972). The AATSP report claims to have had its roots in the merging of two movements of its time: "the growing acceptance by the Spanish teaching profession of responsibility for maintaining and developing the Spanish that is spoken natively in the United States, and the struggle of the nation's native Spanish speakers for a greater measure of cultural self-determination, including a greater role for Spanish in their lives" (p.620). The force of the report lies in its strong political stance and recommendation to the Spanish teaching profession that "whenever in the United States there are pupils or students for whom Spanish is the native tongue, at whatever level from kindergarten to the baccalaureate, there be established in the schools and colleges special sections for developing literacy in Spanish and using it to reinforce or complement other areas of the curriculum, with correspondingly specialized materials, methods, and teachers" (p.620). Most college instructors of Spanish might agree that the teaching of Spanish to Spanish-speaking students must use a different pedagogy, but many are uninformed, undertrained, and unfamiliar with theory, teaching approaches, and effective classroom techniques. As Christian Faltis (1990) has pointed out, "within the field . . . there is a well-defined division with respect to how to most effectively and efficiently teach Spanish to bilingual speakers" (p. 117).

Motivation for Participating in SNS Courses

The reasons Hispanic bilingual students want to study Spanish at the university are varied. Most Hispanic students born in the United States do not learn to read and write in Spanish because schooling is conducted in English. Many students want to develop literacy skills in their native language, realizing the personal value and career advantages of bilingualism. Some students are interested in participating in SNS courses because they want to "activate" their Spanish once again or to learn more about their language and cultural heritage.

Considerations in Implementing SNS Instruction

• *Proficiency level.* Hispanic bilingual students come to university with different levels of Spanish language proficiency. Many students are completely fluent in Spanish, others may speak Spanish fairly well, while others may possess only basic proficiency. One of the main challenges faced by SNS teachers is defining the specific needs of individual students and placing them in appropriate classes.

• *Literacy skills.* Many Hispanic bilingual students born in the United States receive little or no formal training in Spanish and, therefore, do not develop reading and writing skills in that language. Their use of Spanish is often limited to home and family situations. Lack of literacy skills in Spanish is quite common.

• *Cultural differences.* Hispanic bilingual students come from many different backgrounds. As Frances Aparicio (1983) has pointed out, "Chicanos, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans enjoy their own different ways of doing things, of organizing their thoughts, and of expressing their realities" (p. 233). The culture of students is linked very closely to their particular variety of Spanish. "An understanding of culture and language must be integrated into the classroom as an essential element in the learning of written Spanish" (p. 233).

• *Teacher sensitivity.* It is of foremost importance that the SNS teacher be tolerant of the different linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students. Research "indicates the essential traits of an SNS teacher as one who should be sympathetic to all Hispanic groups and their differences, flexible toward regional linguistic differences, nonimposing of his/her own dialect or mode of speech" (Aparicio, 1983, p. 234).

College-Level Textbooks for Teaching SNS

Because Spanish has traditionally been taught as a foreign language in the United States, few efforts have been made to design textbooks to meet the pedagogical and linguistic needs of Hispanic bilingual college students with different proficiency levels in Spanish. Like most of the research in this area, the materials designed for the teaching of Spanish to these students have focused on the linguistic variables, the culture, and the literature of Mexicans first and Puerto Ricans second. The literature on and teaching materials for Cuban Americans and other more recent immigrant groups (Nicaraguans, Guatemalans, Salvadorans) are scanty at best. Increasingly, experienced SNS teachers are becoming more aware of the lack of appropriate materials and some of the problems involved in teaching students who function at varying levels of comprehension, speaking, reading, and writing in Spanish and English. The majority of SNS texts have adopted approaches and patterns similar, if not identical, to those for teaching Spanish as a foreign language. There are a few good texts, however, that are written for bilingual students and can be adapted for individual classrooms. One of the best-selling textbooks is the pioneering *Español escrito* (1977; 1984; 3rd ed. in press), by Richard V. Teschner and Guadelupe Valdés. This text offers a variety of excellent features related to the teaching of orthography, vocabulary, and the structures of Spanish. Other popular texts include *La lengua que heredamos* (Marqués, 1992); *El español y su estructura: Lectura y escritura para bilingües* (Burunat & Starcevic, 1983); *Mejora tu español: Lectura y redacción para bilingües* (de la Portilla & Varela, 1979); and *Nuestro español: Curso para estudiantes bilingües* (Mejías & Garza-Swan, 1981).

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Useful Ideas for Teaching Spanish to Hispanic Bilinguals

The following is a list of ideas that are useful in teaching Spanish to native speakers at various levels of instruction:

- *Individual journals.* Students can keep a log of class activities and materials or of what has been of special interest to them. The journal will reflect how the student's writing skills have developed.
- *Dialogue journals.* Students can keep a journal in which they communicate in writing with the teacher. Dialogue journals provide the student with writing practice and show the teacher how the student is progressing in the development of writing skills.
- *Vocabulary expansion assignments.* These are exercises that allow students to use new words, through activities such as creating sentences that include the new vocabulary.
- *Translation.* Students can develop writing skills and learn vocabulary through translation of literature and other materials. Translation "offers students the opportunity to discuss linguistic differences between both languages at the written level and to realize that there are alternatives, or various ways of expressing an idea" (Aparicio, 1983).
- *Interpreting practice.* Three students can role-play: one of them speaks English only, one speaks Spanish only, and one speaks both. The student who speaks both has the task of interpreting for the other two students.
- *Composition writing and individual and group editing of sample compositions* can provide students with writing practice and allow feedback from peers.
- *Oral and aural practice* can be provided through class discussions and oral presentations, opportunities to listen to guest speakers, interviewing and reporting in Spanish, and use of audiovisual materials, such as films on video. (Sample films include *El norte; La historia oficial; Conducta impropia; Yo soy Pablo Neruda; Camila Consuelo; ¿Quiénes?; El hombre mirando hacia el sudeste; Mujer al borde de un ataque de nervios; El nido.*) Also, two Spanish language television stations are available in the United States: Univision and Telemundo.
- *Satellite television* can internationalize the SNS class through live transmissions from Spanish-speaking countries.
- *Presentations* can be given on such topics as the history of the Spanish language; its importance and place in the world today; the varieties of Spanish spoken in the United States; historical background concerning Hispanics in the United States; the importance of being bilingual and biliterate; and the official English movement in the United States and its implications.
- *Team teaching and content area teaching.* SNS faculty can work in collaboration with bilingual faculty from English, linguistics, bilingual education, politics, history, sociology, history, anthropology, art, and music to provide academic instruction in Spanish. This gives Hispanic students the opportunity to acquire academic Spanish language skills and to continue to develop their Spanish proficiency while pursuing their academic studies.
- *Study abroad opportunities* can be developed that are tailored to Hispanic bilingual students.

(For details on these and other recommendations, see Roca, 1992.)

Existing SNS Programs

Although SNS instruction is not available at every college or university where it would seem likely, given the size of the Hispanic population of the student body, this kind of Spanish language instruction has become more widely available. Today, with the Hispanic population in the United States witnessing tremendous growth, it appears that a greater number of colleges are offering SNS courses on a regular basis, and an increasing number of institutions have begun to develop programs. These include the University of Miami, Florida International University, Florida-Atlantic University, Miami-Dade Community College, the University of Florida at Gainesville, the University of Maryland at College Park, the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, the University of Arizona-Tucson, and others.

Conclusion

In examining Spanish language instruction for U.S. Hispanic bilingual college students during the last 20 years or so, a review of the literature shows that the development of such instruction has come a long way in terms of research and the development of instructional materials. There remains, nevertheless, much research to be done on ways to improve college-level Spanish instruction for the Hispanic bilingual. Questions have been raised recently about how much the profession has achieved on a national scale regarding the teaching of Spanish to native speakers; how far the profession has come in shaping theoretical paradigms on which to base SNS instruction; what progress has been made in the practice of assessing the bilingual student's language proficiency; how current placement tests can be improved; and how individual colleges and universities are dealing with language requirement exemptions, language placement, credit-by-examination, and SNS curriculum development needs. For more information on the topic, a collection of essays titled *Teaching Spanish to the Hispanic Bilingual: Issues, Aims, and Methods* (Valdés, Lozano, & García-Moya, 1981) remains the best source of information on teaching Spanish to U.S. Hispanic bilingual students.

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